

# THE VALUE OF MORAL PRACTICE IN BUDDHISM

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## ABSTRACT

*Moral conduct (Sīla in Pāli) is one of the most important pillars of Buddhism and is based on universal values. It is frequently translated into English as “Virtuous behavior” “Morality” “Ethics” or “Precept”. Buddhist ethical principles which were formulated by the Buddha refer to moral purity of thought, words and deeds. The morality found in all the precepts can be summarized in three principles – to avoid evil; doing good; and to purify the mind; this is the teaching of all Buddha’s (Dhammapāda, 183). Buddhist morality is not only confined in good or bad actions, it also includes the unchanging natural law of cause and effect (kamma), which is the root of the Buddhist ethics. It plays an important role in promoting peace and happiness in modern society and protecting the environment from degradation. Furthermore, it helps in modifying a person’s behavior and transforms his emotional and cognitive constitution. This study will investigate the significance of Buddhist morality in modern society and how to prevent environmental degradation. More specially, it will focus on how Buddhist morality helps a person to modify his/her behavior and transform emotive and cognitive constitution to liberation from saṃsāra (recycling birth).*

## INTRODUCTION

Moral values are the standards of good and bad, which determine individual behavior and choices. An Individuals sense of morality

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may be derived from society and government, self or religion. Religion is a great source of moral values and most of the religions have set of do's and don'ts, a set of code of conduct. As a religion Buddhism also have provided such sets of code of conduct but Buddhism tends to believe that Morals are far more than just about good and bad. It is the *dhammā* or universal law, which governs both the physical and moral order of the universe.

### WHAT IS "MORALITY"

Morality is termed in Buddhism as *Sīla* and it is frequently described as morals, discipline, ethics and precept. *Sīla* is an inner virtue, i.e, endowment with the qualities of simplicity, kindness, contentment, practice etc, which is expressed outwardly, by the virtuous actions of body and speech, and is done by following the rules of conduct intended to give these ideas concrete form. The Buddha has given as classic definition of good conduct and bad conduct in the *Mahā Rāhulovādasutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*: whatever action, bodily, verbal or mental, leads to suffering for oneself, for others or for both, that action is bad (*akusalā*). Whatever action, bodily, verbal or mental, does not lead to suffering for oneself, for others or for both, that action is good (*Kusalā*). Human beings are not perfect being by nature; they have to train themselves to be good hence, morality becomes the most important aspect of living.

Morality describes the system of behavior with regards to standards of right or wrong behavior, without this in place societies cannot survive for long. Everyone adheres to a moral doctrine of some kind, although in today's world morality is frequently thought of as belonging to particular religious point of view. According to a British renowned thinker, scholar and author C.S. Lewis, Morality has three important levels as it relates to our behavior and defines them as (1) make certain fair play and harmony; (2) to help make us good people in order to have a good society; and (3) keeping us in good relationships with the power that created us (All About Philosophy, 2002-2018). Professor Lewis explains that most of the people agree with the point 1, When we began to see problem occurring by the point 2. Considering the popular philosophy "I am not hurting anyone but myself," people used to excuse bad

personal choices do hurt others person of the society. The point 3 refers to the question of creation, as a theory of origin, is definitely hotly debated in today society, while the majority of the world's population believes in God, therefore, this is the most disagreement surfaces. According to Ven. Walpola Rahula, "The idea of moral justice arises out of the conception of a supreme being, a God, who sits in judgment, who is law-giver and who decides what it right and wrong" (Wayne, 2016).

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BUDDHIST MORALITY IN MODERN SOCIETY

The Buddha was the first religious thinker in the history to emphasize the social harmony and its cohesion with humanity. During the time of the Buddha, the *Brahmin* dominance and in the Hindu social order the caste systems were very rigid and Buddha totally opposed the caste system. Buddha said that, "*Cattāro vaṇṇā samasamā*" which means the four classes are equal to one another. Every human being is equal and no one is more superior on inferior. Every person irrespective of his caste could enter the Buddhist order of monks. To define the caste system Buddha said, "not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a *brahmin*. By (one's) action one becomes an outcaste, by (one's) action one becomes a *brahmin*." (Sn 136).

Today, Modern society is immensely influenced by modern science which has made human life much easier through tremendous material progress. But still it cannot make human life more contented, secure and safe. Acts of terrorism, violence, violation of human rights, discrimination, poverty and destitution are frequently witnessed in many parts of the world. From Buddhist stand point, scientific and technological progress has failed in reduction of the un-wholesome action of human behavior. The teachings of the Buddha are very much relevant to the crisis faced by the world today. In order to bring peace and happiness in the society as well as global community; unity is very important. Unity is the more powerful than division that is why Buddha in the *Siḅālovāda sutta* has been introduced the four foundations of social unity (*Sanḅaha-vatthus*). These are Give (*dāna*); Kindly Speech (*piya-vācā*); Helpful action (*atha-cariya*); and impartial treatment

and equal participation (*samānattātā*). There are more others important suttas included code of ethics for the household people are the *Mahāmaṅgalasutta*, *Dhammikasutta*, *Parābhavasutta* and *Vasālī sutta* of the *Sutta nipāta*, and *Vyaggapajjia (Dīghajāṇu) sutta* and the *Ghisukhasutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya*.

The Golden five rules or precepts is a guidance on how to be happy and successful in this life and next life. This is the most widely known lists of precepts in Buddhism.

1. To refrain from destroying living creatures.
2. To refrain from taking that which is not given.
3. To refrain from sexual misconduct.
4. To refrain from incorrect speech.
5. To refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

The Buddha has been given a beautiful and most authenticity axiom, “*Yo attānaṃ rakkhati, so paraṃ rakkhati*” means he who protect himself protects others; or “*Paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ rakkhati*” means when you protect others, you protect yourself. Therefore, when one practice the five precepts scrupulously able to protect oneself and others. However, apart from the five precepts another lists of precepts are found such as eight precepts (*aṣṭaṅga-sīla*) and the for the novice and monk ten precepts (*daṣasīla*), and 227 precepts and the nun 311 precepts. The Buddhist teaching on the four sublime states (*Brahma-vihāra*) are of great significance as a way of life at the individual level as well as social level. These are a series of virtues and the meditation practices made to cultivate them. The four sublime emotional states are:

1. To extend loving kindness (*mettā*) to all living beings without any kind of discrimination and with good will towards all;
2. Compassion (*karuṇā*) is identifying the suffering of others as one’s own. It is a results from *mettā*.
3. Sympathetic joy (*muditā*) refers to the feeling of joy because others are happy, even if one did not contribute to it.

4. Equanimity (*upekkhā*) one of the most sublime emotions of Buddhist practice, is the ground for wisdom and freedom and the protector of compassion and love. This refers an even-mindedness and serenity, treating and events impartially.

These Buddhist sublime virtues deemed to bring immense peace and happiness in the trouble world or society where we live in. As expressed by a noted Thai scholar monk: a society of self-disciplined, self-reliant people will be peaceful, and in turn support individual growth and development. In this process, the importance of associating with good people is often stressed, so that good qualities are stimulated, reinforced and spread (Harvey, 2000).

#### BUDDHIST MORALITY CONTRIBUTION ON PREVENTING ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

The environment is an important issue. It's includes all living and non-living things which interact with us like air, water and energy. Environment pollution has existed for centuries but only started to be significant following the industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which is one of the greatest challenges that world is facing today. The continuing exponential growth in human activities such as burning fossil fuels and clearing forests for industry and farm use is the responsible for affecting earth climate.

In many parts of the world deserts are expanding, forests are shrinking, the atmosphere is warming, soil is eroding, rivers are running dry and therefore environment protection must be taken seriously. Buddhism is considered as an ecological religion and teaches that human beings should live in harmony with nature and all other creatures. In the *pāli* canon several *suttas* has mentioned that early Buddhism believes that there to be close relationships between human morality and natural environment. And also has mentioned about five natural laws (*pañca-niyamadhamma*) namely; *utuniyama*, *bījanīyama*, *cittanīyama*, *kammanīyama*, and *dhammanīyama* (Lily , 2005). They can be translated respectively as physical laws, biological laws, psychological laws, moral laws, and causal laws. The first four laws operate within their respective spheres. The last mentioned law of causality operated within each of them as well as among them.

This sutta further explain the pattern of mutual interaction. When a mankind demoralized through greed, ignorance and hatred, the famine is the natural outcome, epidemic is the inevitable result, widespread violence is the ultimate outcome. According to a Buddhist scholar Buddhadasa's "The nature (*thammachat*) and the *Dhammā* can contribute toward transforming our understanding, attitudes, and actions regarding the care of the earth" (Bhikkhu, 1994, 2014). Buddhism response a gentle non-violent attitude towards living creatures and plants. It is said that if one throws dish water into a pool where there are insects and living creatures, intending that they feed on the tiny particles of food thus washed away. One can accumulate merits even by such trivial generosity. And the Buddha also feed the fish his leftover food into a river. For the plant life Buddha said his disciples one should not even break the branch of tree because that may has given one shelter and showing gratitude and reverence to the mountains, forests, groves and trees for giving us food, shadow, shelter and protect from the natural disasters (Lily , 2005).

However, Buddhism is connected to environment and has a responsibility to share knowledge of global resistance against environment degradation. There are various aspects and dimensions of Buddhist perspectives on environmental conservation and sustainable development. Buddhist attitudes to nature is perceived as relational, and each phenomenon is dependent on a multitude causes and conditions. Therefore, human beings should respect and live in tune with environment. Changeability is one of the perennial principles of nature. Everything changes nothing remains static in nature.

In Buddhism this phenomenon is called *aniccā* (impermanence). *Sabbe Saṅkhārāniccā* means everything formed is in a constant process of change, that natural processes are affected by the morals of man. According to His Holiness Dalilama, "the moral degradation had effects on the external environment too." In the *Cakkavattisihanānda Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* mentioned that, when human morals undergo further degeneration, man's health become progressively worse. Human life is reduced to ten years. At that time all delicacies food such as ghee, honey, butter will have disappeared from the world. And the poorest coarse food today will

become a delicacy of that day. Thus Buddhism maintains that a close link between man's morals and the natural resources (Lily , 2005). The middle path or the noble eight-fold path is the way to reduce ecological footprints for sustainable future. Morality consists of three factors; i.e, Right speech, Right action and Right livelihood focused on the five precepts (*pañcha-sīla*) of the noble eightfold path of the teaching of *dhammā*. These five precepts are the basic ethical guideline which teaches us not to kill any beings, stay with natural vegetation wild animals in harmony and for natural survival.

### BUDDHISM - FREEDOM THROUGH DISCIPLINE

Human aspiration is to be free from suffering and find happiness, to be free from bondage and find true freedom and purity of mind. To be free from darkness and find the happiness- Buddha has seen the fundamental and underlying causes which leads to suffering, happiness, bondage and liberation that is mind itself. The Buddha had seen even more deeply into these factors of the mind which were responsible for both bondage and liberation. He saw the three unwholesome rules or negative emotions or destructive roots greed, hatred and delusion. Buddha's teaching emphasized on personal liberation from the three unwholesome or destructive roots.

The eight-fold path a set of practical guidelines which helps to improve ethical and mental development. It is the only through practice that one can attain a higher level of understand and destroy the fundamental roots of three destructive unwholesome emotions. The middle way is nothing if not moral, and such morality of righteousness are- Understanding, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration an eightfold aim which provides the core of the Buddhist philosophy of life. The eightfold path can be divided into three groups that represents three stages of training: the training in the higher moral discipline, the training in the higher consciousness, and the training in the higher wisdom (Bodhi 1994).

1. *Paññākkhandha*, the wisdom group, made up of right view and right intention;
2. *Samādhikkhandha*, the concentration group, made up of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration;

3. *Sīlakkhandha*, the moral discipline group, made up of right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

#### **Right view:**

Right view is considering as the first step of the noble eightfold path which is also known as middle path leading to the cessation of suffering when the individual understands the source of suffering, he often determines to change the way he engages with himself and the world.

#### **Right intention:**

Right intention is the kind of mental energy that control our action. It refers to the cognitive aspect of wisdom. There are three kinds of right intentions:

1. Intention of renunciation, which means resistance to the pull of desire.
2. Intention of good will, means resistance to feeling of anger and aversion and,
3. Intention of homelessness, means do not think act cruelly, violently and to develop compassion. However, it is the only possible through managing emotions.

#### **Right Speech:**

Speech is very important to us and very powerful. it can be break or safe lives, make enemies or make friends, start war or create peace.

#### **Buddhism explained right speech as follow:**

1. To avoid false speech, especially not to tell deliberate lies and not to speak deceitfully;
2. To avoid slanderous speech;
3. To avoid harsh words that offend or hurt others;
4. To avoid idle talk; instead of this positively, to tell the truth, to speak in a friendly, warm, and gentle way, and to talk only when necessary.

#### **Right action:**

Right action passion at promoting moral, right-mined and peaceful conduct. Bhikkhu Bodhi writes, in the context of the

Noble eight-fold path: “The Buddha mentions three components of right action: abstaining from taking life, abstaining from taking what is not given, and abstaining from sexual misconduct.” He notes that right intention is the most important to avoid these proscribed actions. Right intentions lead to right actions.

#### Right Livelihood:

Right livelihood is living in a righteous way and the wealth should be acquired legally, honestly, peacefully, and ethically. Of course, livelihood means not only our job, but also all our main daily activities that we do to have food, clothes, shelter and so on. The Buddha has mentioned five specific kinds of livelihood one should be avoided: dealing in weapons; dealing in living beings (raising animal for slaughter, slave trade and prostitution); working in meat production and butchery and; selling intoxicants and poisons, such as drugs and alcohol (Bhikkhu, 2001).

#### Right effort:

Right effort is one of the three elements of the mental discipline (the others right mindfulness and right concentration). Right effort is the energetic will (1) to abandon evil and un-wholesome states of mind from arising; (2) to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen; (3) to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen; and (4) to develop and bring to perfection the good and wholesome states of mind already present in a man (Thera, 1999).

#### Right Mindfulness:

Right mindfulness means being aware of the moment, and being focused in that moment. It is a very grounded awareness which is to be diligently aware, mindful and attentive with regard to (1) the body action (*kāya*); (2) feeling (*vedanā*), (3) thoughts (*citta*) and; (4) mental objects (*imagination, image of mind*). The Buddha elucidated mindfulness when one fully developed, as the direct path to enlightenment and the ending of suffering:

*This is the one-way path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentations, for the passing away of pain and dejection, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of Nibbāna – namely, the four establishments of mindfulness. “What*

*are the four? A person dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having subdued longing and dejection in regard to the world. He or she dwells contemplating feelings in feelings, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having subdued longing and dejection in regard to the world. He or she dwells contemplating mind in mind, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having subdued longing and dejection in regard to the world. He or she dwells contemplating phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having subdued longing and dejection in regard to the world” (Bodhi, 2005).*

### **Right Concentration:**

Right concentration for the purpose of the eightfold path means wholesome concentration. It is the practice of concentration on breathing (*ānāpānasati*) is one of the well-known exercises connected with the body, for mental development. To develop the mental development right effort is clearly needed because without right effort concentrating on something can't make any efforts, as well as for all the other limbs of the eightfold path.

The deepest states of concentration known as “*jhānas*” or “*samādhis*” eliminate the hindrances. The three factors: right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration of the concentration group can help one penetrates into the true nature of mental and physical processed. Thereby one can able to attain right view by realization of insight wisdom. However, the noble eightfold path is the fourth of the Buddha's noble truths which the only way that leads to uprooting of the causes of suffering, and helps to established profound, peacefulness, wisdom, virtue and happiness.

### **CONCLUSION**

Moral values are connected to fundamental human emotions and experiences that motivate us in distinctive ways. Emotions itself has no nature good or bad, generally they are divided into positive and negative emotions and helps in inducing behavior that has good or bad consequences. It cannot be completely excluded but they can be effectively managed and moderately controlled. Buddhism immensely helps to transforms negative emotions into positive emotions. Morality is the one incredible way to manage

emotions. By practicing morality and doing all wholesome actions and avoiding all unwholesome actions, even tiny bad things we can manage our emotions and find a positive life. In the digital era, most of the people are empowered with technology.

The technology which is supposed to make our life beautiful and easy, has become the source of all the problems that we can destroying the very bases of life which is the planet. Today 6 billion people do destroying the peace and ecological balance of the planet. All serious problems in society are created because of man's ignorance and illegitimate desires. What I believe, Buddhist morality or Buddhist ethics or Buddhist virtue ethics is goal directed. It aims at transforming the practitioner into being liberated and involves eradicating vice, and cultivating virtue. According to Buddhist account, what makes an action good or "wholesome" is that it is well-motivated, well-intentioned, and wise. Being well-motivated, well-intentioned and wise we can establish sustainable peace, happiness, progress and environmental sustainability in the earth.

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